Judge blocks Trump's push to end legal status of migrants

Washington preparing to deport Iranians despite unrest, killings, says NGO

BOSTON: A federal judge has blocked the Trump administration's push to terminate the legal status of more than 8,400 family members of US citizens and green card holders who moved to the United States from seven Latin American countries.

Boston-based US District Judge Indira Talwani issued a preliminary injunction late on Saturday that prevents the Department of Homeland Security from ending the humanitarian parole granted to thousands of people from Cuba, Haiti, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

They had been allowed to move to the United States under family reunification parole programmes that were created or modernised by Democratic President Joe Biden's administration.

Since Republican President Donald Trump succeeded Biden, his administration has ramped up immigration enforcement with $170 billion budgeted for immigration agencies through September 2029, a historic sum.

Under the family reunification programmes, US citizens or lawful permanent residents, also known as green card holders, could apply to serve as sponsors for family members in those seven countries, letting them live in the US while they waited for their immigrant visas to become available.

The Homeland Security Department said on Dec 12 it was ending the programmes on the grounds that they were inconsistent with Trump's immigration enforcement priorities and were abused to allow "poorly vetted aliens to circumvent the traditional parole process." The termination was originally set to take effect January 14, but Talwani issued a temporary restraining order blocking it for 14 days while she considered whether to issue Saturday's longer-term injunction.

Talwani said the department, led by Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, had provided no support for its fraud concerns or considered whether individuals could feasibly return to their home countries, where many had sold homes or left jobs.

"The Secretary could not provide a reasoned explanation of the agency's change in policy without acknowledging these interests," wrote Talwani, who was appointed by Democratic President Barack Obama.

"Accordingly, failure to do so was arbitrary and capricious." The department did not respond to a request for comment. The ruling came in a class action lawsuit pursued by immigrant rights advocates challenging the administration's broader rollback of temporary parole granted to hundreds of thousands of migrants.

Talwani earlier in that case blocked the administration from ending grants of parole to about 430,000 Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans, but the Supreme Court lifted her order, which an appeals court later overturned.

Deportation of Iranians

The Trump administration plans to repatriate Iranian migrants from the United States despite their home country still reeling from massive protests during which thousands were killed, according to an Iranian-American NGO.

The deportation flights would be the first to Iran since the beginning of the mass uprisings in the country, which peaked in early January before being violently repressed.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to launch military strikes on Iran in response to the crackdown, but has since appeared to walk back those threats after he said Tehran suspended planned executions.

The National Iranian American Council (NIAC) said it had learned that Trump's administration was planning to restart deportation flights to Iran, after prior removals in September and December.

"The same administration that promised Iranians that 'help is on the way' amid a deadly crackdown is now forcibly sending Iranians back into danger," said NIAC president Jamal Abdi.

Abolfazl Mehrabadi, a diplomat representing Tehran's interests in the United States, told Iran's official IRNA news agency on Saturday that about 40 Iranians were to be deported. They will depart on Sunday from an airport in Phoenix, Arizona, he said.

Among them are two gay men who face execution in Iran, where homosexuality is punishable by death, according to a statement from the American Immigration Council, an immigrant advocacy organisation representing them.

The two men are currently being held in an immigration detention center in Arizona, and legal proceedings to prevent their deportation are still ongoing, according to the organisation.—Agencies

Israeli strikes kill two in south Lebanon

BEIRUT: Israeli strikes on south Lebanon killed two people on Sunday, the health ministry reported, with Israel's military saying it struck Hezbollah targets.

Israel has kept up regular strikes in Lebanon despite a November 2024 truce that sought to end more than a year of hostilities with Hezbollah, usually saying it is targeting members of the Iran-backed group or its infrastructure.

In a statement, Lebanon's health ministry said "an Israeli enemy raid" near the town of Khirbet Selm killed one person and wounded another five.

It said a separate strike in the village of Derdghaya killed one more person.

The Israeli army said it struck a "weapons manufacturing site" in the area of Khirbet Selm where it had "identified the terrorist activity of Hezbollah operatives".

It also reported a strike in the Derdghaya area, saying that "in response to Hezbollah's repeated violations of the ceasefire understandings", it carried out an attack on a member of the group there.

The army said it struck "military infrastructure sites belonging to Hezbollah" in the eastern Bekaa area as well.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported that one of the strikes in the south targeted a hangar, while the one in Derdghaya targeted a car. The attack in the east hit mountains near the town of Nabi Sheet, NNA said.

On Wednesday, Israel struck four crossings along the Syria-Lebanon border, alleging they were used by Hezbollah to smuggle weapons.

Lebanon's army said this month it had completed the first phase of its plan to disarm Hezbollah, covering the area south of the Litani river, around 30 kilometres (20 miles) from the Israeli border.

Israel, which accuses Hezbollah of rearming, has criticised the army's progress as insufficient, while Hezbollah has rejected calls to surrender its weapons.—AFP

Security guarantees document from US is 100pc ready: Zelensky

VILNIUS: A US document on security guarantees for Ukraine is completely ready and Kyiv is waiting for a time and place for it to be signed, President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Sunday, indicating that weekend talks with Russia in Abu Dhabi made some progress.

"For us, security guarantees are first and foremost guarantees of security from the United States. The document is 100pc ready, and we are waiting for our partners to confirm the date and place when we will sign it," Zelensky told a news conference during a visit to Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital.

"The document will then be sent for ratification to the US Congress and the Ukrainian parliament," he said. On Friday and Saturday, Ukrainian and Russian negotiators held their first trilateral meeting including US mediators in Abu Dhabi to discuss Washington's framework for ending the almost four-year-old war, but no deal emerged.

However, Moscow and Kyiv both said they were open to further dialogue and more discussions were expected next Sunday in Abu Dhabi, a US official told reporters immediately after the weekend talks.—Reuters

Bangladesh slams India over Hasina's speech

DHAKA: Bangladesh said on Sunday it was "surprised" and "shocked" that India had allowed fugitive former prime minister Sheikh Hasina to make a public address in New Delhi.

Hasina, 78, fled to neighbouring India in August 2024 after a student-led uprising ended her iron-fisted 15-year rule. She made her first public speech since then in an audio address to a packed press club in Delhi on Friday.

She was found guilty in absentia by a Dhaka court in November of incitement, issuing an order to kill and inaction to prevent atrocities and was sentenced to be hanged.

"The government and the people of Bangladesh are surprised and shocked," Dhaka's foreign ministry said in a statement.

"Allowing the event to take place in the Indian capital and letting mass murderer Hasina openly deliver her hate speech... constitute a clear affront to the people and the Government of Bangladesh."

It said allowing Hasina to make the speech set "a dangerous precedent" that could "seriously impair bilateral relations".—AFP

India afraid peace board may try to 'resolve Kashmir'

Continued from Page 1

used outside Gaza as well".

He said that some UN officials are also indicating that this framework can be applied to other conflict areas.

But Ranjit Roy, who was India's ambassador to Nepal and Vietnam, believes that it won't be easy for New Delhi to take a decision on Trump's 'Board of Peace'.

"India's dilemma has increased. Whether India accepts it or rejects it, it will have an impact. I think the risks of joining the Peace Board are high. First of all, Trump is its chairman and it seems pointless to expect justice from his transactional approach," *BBC Hindi* quoted him as saying.

"It is not clear whether each country will have the same status in this," said Roy.

"Just like in the UN General Assembly, each country has only one vote. When the Security Council approved it, it was limited to Gaza, but now that there have been changes, it could extend beyond Gaza."

The editorial in *The Hindu* argued that "the rift in US-India relations and the delicate situation of trade talks may also be reasons for not rejecting Trump's invitation at this stage. Doing so could incur Trump's displeasure, as in the case of the French president."

MEMBERS of Myanmar's Union Election commission count ballots after the closing of polls at a polling station in the third phase of general election in Yangon on Sunday.—AFP

Myanmar's junta allies head for landslide election win

Democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi remains detained and her hugely popular party dissolved

MANDALAY: Voting concluded in Myanmar's month-long election on Sunday, with the dominant pro-military party on course for landslide victory in a junta-run poll critics say will only prolong the army's grip on power.

The Southeast Asian nation has a long history of military rule, but the generals took a back seat for a decade of civilian-led reforms.

That ended in a 2021 military coup when democratic figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi was detained, civil war broke out, and the country descended into humanitarian crisis.

The election's third and final phase closed after voting took place in dozens of constituencies across the country, just a week shy of the coup's five-year anniversary.

The military pledges the election will return power to the people but with Suu Kyi sidelined and her hugely popular party dissolved, democracy advocates say the ballot is stacked with military allies.

Junta chief Min Aung Hlaing — who has not ruled out serving as president after the poll — toured voting stations in Mandalay, wearing civilian dress.

"This is the path chosen by the people," he told reporters in response to a question from this news agency. "The people from Myanmar can support whoever they want to support." Voting is not being held in rebel-held parts of the country, and in junta-controlled areas rights monitors say the run-up has been characterised by coercion and the crushing of dissent.

Teacher Zaw Ko Ko Myint cast his vote at a Mandalay high school around dawn.

"Although I do not expect much, we want to see a better country," the 53-year-old said. "I feel relieved after voting, as if I fulfilled my duty."

'Fabricated vote'

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) — packed with retired officers and described by analysts as a military puppet — won more than 85 per cent of elected lower house seats and two-thirds of those in the upper house in the poll's first two phases.

"States that endorse the results of these polls will be complicit in the junta's attempt to legitimise military rule through a fabricated vote," UN rights expert Tom Andrews said in a statement. Official results are expected late this week.

A military-drafted constitution also gives the armed forces a quarter of the seats in both houses of parliament, which will vote as a whole to pick the president.

"I don't expect anything from this election," a 34-year-old Yangon resident said earlier, requesting anonymity for security reasons. "Things will just keep dragging on." Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party thrashed the USDP in the last elections in 2020, before the military seized power on Feb 1, 2021, making unfounded allegations of widespread vote-rigging.

The 80-year-old Nobel Peace Prize laureate remains detained incommunicado at an unknown location on charges rights monitors dismiss as politically motivated.

'Not safe at all'

The military has long presented itself as the only force guarding restive Myanmar from rupture and ruin. But its putsch tipped the country into full-blown civil war, with pro-democracy guerrillas fighting the junta alongside a kaleidoscope of ethnic minority armies which have long held sway in the fringes.

Air strikes are frequent in some regions, others enjoy relative peace, while some zones are blockaded, haunted by the spectre of starvation. Polling was called off in one in five lower house constituencies, but some frontline locations went to the polls on Sunday.

"Candidates still haven't held any campaigning because of security," complained one parliamentary candidate. "It's not safe at all to travel." There is no official death toll for Myanmar's civil war. But monitoring group ACLED, which tallies media reports of violence, estimates more than 90,000 have been killed on all sides.

Meanwhile, more than 400 people have been pursued for prosecution under stark new legislation forbidding "disruption" of the election and punishing protest or criticism with up to a decade in prison.

Turnout in the first and second phases of the vote was just over 50 percent, official figures say, compared to roughly 70pc in 2020.—AFP

Anger as woman's headless body found in Istanbul bin

ISTANBUL: The decapitated body of a woman, whose legs were also cut off, was found in a rubbish bin in Istanbul overnight, Turkish media reported on Sunday, sparking fury from women's groups.

Her body was wrapped in a sheet and dumped in a rubbish container in the Sisli district, where it was discovered on Saturday evening by a paper collector looking for items to recycle, the DHA news agency said.

Investigators identified the victim as a 37-year-old Uzbek national. They were not immediately able to find the victim's head or her legs, but while reviewing security camera footage, spotted two men dumping a suitcase at a different bin. It was not immediately clear what it contained.

Hours later, police detained two suspects, also Uzbek nationals, at Istanbul Airport as they were trying to leave the country, DHA said. They later arrested a third suspect.

Women's rights groups expressed outrage, calling for demonstrators to join two protest marches in Istanbul and Ankara.

Large crowds met at Osmanbey metro station in Sisli, carrying banners and placards reading "Stop male violence!", "We demand justice for women who are murdered" and "Migrant women are not alone", NGO footage showed.

"Women will no longer be silent!" chanted the crowd as they marched to the place where the woman's body was found, their numbers estimated to be over a thousand.

In Ankara, hundreds more marched at a protest called by the Stop Femicides platform, which demanded accountability for the woman murdered in Sisli.

"The perpetrators were so confident nothing would happen to them that they could just leave the body of the woman they killed in a bin in plain view," Isil Kurt of Stop Femicides said in a statement.

"Even though years pass and cities and names change, violence against women remains the same." —AFP

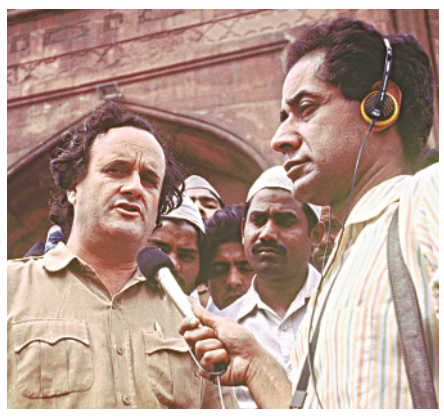
Radio legend Mark Tully dies at 90

By Jawed Naqvi in New Delhi

OBITUARY

MARK Tully who died at a private hospital in New Delhi on Sunday was a sensation and a legend in radio journalism, much of it in his avatar as the *BBC's* iconic bureau chief in India. Tully was 90 and had been battling esophageal cancer in recent years.

"Tully Saab" was what his favourite cabbies of the black and yellow Ambassador taxi era called him. And Tully Saab was also the envy of foreign journalists covering India and Pakistan as they struggled to break out of his daunting shadow. Mark Fineman of the *LA Times* was a typical victim. He was traveling by car to a village in Mathura where bitter caste rivalry had led to a Jat mob burning a Jat girl and her two Dalit male friends alive. Fineman had acquired the habit of many Indian journalists of dodging the tiny road tax by declaring themselves the press. At the village toll, Fineman decided not to pay the two-rupee tax and proclaimed himself a foreign correspondent. "Oh! Are you Mark Tully, sir?" the toll collector asked excitedly. "Damn Mark Tully. Take your two rupees and give me the receipt," growled the American journalist with a mixture of anger and secret admiration for his British peer. Tully was appointed *BBC* correspondent in New Delhi in 1971, and named bureau chief a few years later, responsible for covering the South Asia region – which included India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It was a post he held for twenty years, until his retirement in 1994.



MARK Tully records a radio dispatch from New Delhi's Jama Masjid.—Photo courtesy BBC News

His work with the broadcaster was underlined by coverage of historic episodes in post-Independence South Asian history. From the Bangladesh war of 1971 to the Emergency of 1975-77, the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1979, the Army assault on the Golden Temple, the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, and the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992.

Operation Blue Star and the Punjab problem were the subjects of Tully's first book, "Amritsar: Mrs Gandhi's Last Battle" (1985), co-written with *BBC* journalist Satish Jacob. Mark Tully's cult figure has hinged on his high calibre professionalism as a journalist, but it owed in no small measure also to his run-in with Mrs Gandhi over her declaration of the emergency. She expelled him in 1975 but he was welcomed back by the next government. Tully's bete noir that she was, Mrs Gandhi must have cursed the irony of being the founder of the transistor revolution in India, the very medium that made Tully the trusted radio reporter for millions across South Asia. *BBC's* broadcast in a range of languages including Urdu, Hindi and Bangla were a force multiplier in his popularity.

Tully was born in Calcutta (now Kolkata) on October 24, 1935. His father was the director of a railroad and a partner in a holding company that owned a bank, an insurance firm, and tea plantations. After the Second World War, his parents sent him to boarding school in the United Kingdom. He later took theology courses at Cambridge University and then entered a seminary.

Returning to London in 1969, Tully headed the Hindi service and then the West Asia service – for which he covered the India-Pakistan war that led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Tully's first major book on his years in India came in 1988 in the form of "No Full Stops in India", condensing his more than two decades of work in the country in a collection of 10 journalistic essays covering some of the prominent news events, including Operation Blue Star, Roop Kanwar Sati case, Ramanand Sagar's "Ramayan", and the Kumbh Mela that he witnessed in 1977.

"The stories I tell in this book will, I hope, serve to illustrate the way in which Western thinking has distorted and still distorts Indian life — I might almost say they are parables. They provide no answers to India's poverty, but I believe they do suggest where we should begin to look for those answers — in India itself," he wrote in the book's introduction.

An acclaimed author, Tully was also the presenter of the *BBC Radio 4* programme 'Something Understood'. He was knighted in 2002 and received the Padma Bhushan from the government of India in 2005.